

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Choosing Music for Your Band

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The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Choosing Music for Your Band

PREMISE:

There is “good,” “bad,” and “ugly” music written every year for our bands.

Finding “Good” Music— A Primary Responsibility of Instrumental Music Teachers

- ◆ Definition:
Good music has the qualities of *excellent construction* and *genuine expressiveness*.
- ◆ James Neilson (*What Is Quality in Music?*) lists these factors in “quality” music:
 - Rhythmic vitality
 - Genuine originality
 - Melody that has the qualities of economy, logic, and inspiration
 - Harmony that is consistent with and suitable to the style
 - Craftsmanship
 - A sense of values (meaning that everything is in balance and proportion, and that there is a sense of continuity)
 - Emotion justified
According to Neilson “...‘good’ music ennobles the soul and enlightens both mind and spirit.”
 - Quality and personal taste
It is okay to let your personal taste be part of the selection process.
 - The test of time
- ◆ Note:
Even if it’s good music, it may not be *appropriate* for your ensemble.

How to Find a Good Match for Your Ensemble

- ◆ Choose music that *features strengths* and *develops weaknesses*.
- ◆ Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your ensemble. (See Figure 5.1.)
 - Form – tone, intonation, technique, articulation, staccato style, legato style, musicality, range, endurance, soloists, and musical maturity of the section
 - Overall evaluation
 - Major strengths and major weaknesses
 - Musical goals and literature suggestions

Ypsilanti High School — Ensemble Evaluation Form

| | Tone | Intonation | Technique | Articulation | Staccato | Legato | Musicality | Range | Endurance | Soloists | Maturity | Overall |
|-------------------|------|------------|-----------|--------------|----------|--------|------------|-------|-----------|----------|----------|---------|
| Flute/Piccolo | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Oboe/English Horn | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bassoon | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Clarinet | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Lower Clarinet | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Saxophone | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| French Horn | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cornet/Trumpet | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Trombone | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Euphonium | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tuba | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Percussion | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Violin | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Viola | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Cello | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bass | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total Ensemble | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Major Strengths:

Major Weaknesses:

Suggestions for Improvement:

Goals:

Possible Literature:

+ = above average
 x = average
 - = below average
 o = not applicable

Figure 5.1.
Sample Ensemble Evaluation Form

Suggestions

- ◆ “Music of high quality need not be music of high complexity.”
—*Bennett Reimer*
- ◆ Most of the literature we select should be somewhat sight-readable.
- ◆ Reward publishers of good music.

The Search—A “Sifting” Process to Find the Few “Grains of Wheat”

- ◆ Refer to new music reviews in professional journals.
- ◆ Evaluate scores and CD booklets from publishers using criteria discussed.
- ◆ Take notes as you listen and consider whether each piece is appropriate for use now or in the future.

The Selection

- ◆ The following checklist may be helpful as you choose music for your ensembles:
 - ✓ Does the piece have musical integrity?
 - ✓ Will my ensemble members grow musically
 - ✓ Are there opportunities for expressive playing?
 - ✓ Are there good melodies, harmonies, and textures?
 - ✓ Are there a variety of keys, styles, meters, and technical complexity?
 - ✓ Does the piece “fit” the group?
 - ✓ Is a good full score available?
 - ✓ Can we cover all the percussion parts?
 - ✓ Is the percussion writing musical and logical?
 - ✓ Are the demands developmentally appropriate for my ensemble?
 - ✓ Does the piece fulfill a particular programming need?
 - ✓ Will my students benefit from working on this piece?
 - ✓ Will our audience benefit from hearing this piece?
 - ✓ Will I benefit from studying, rehearsing, and conducting this piece?
 - ✓ Would the maturity of this music balance well with other music we’re studying?
 - ✓ Do all of the pieces selected for this program provide variety?
 - ✓ Will this piece help develop solo skills in my ensemble?
 - ✓ Is this piece one of the finest examples of its type in the repertoire?
 - ✓ Do we have adequate time to learn this piece?
 - ✓ Can we play this piece without major substitutions?

Sources of Quality Music

- ◆ Lending library groups
- ◆ *Teaching Music through Performance in Band* series (several volumes) by Richard Miles, et al.
- ◆ *Best Music for Beginning Band*, *Best Music for Young Bands*, and *Best Music for High School Bands* by Thomas L. Dvorak, et al. (edited by Bob Margolis)
- ◆ *Music for Concert Band* by Joseph Kreines
- ◆ *Teaching Band and Orchestra* by Lynn Cooper
- ◆ “Young Band Repertoire Project”—a series of recordings for school band, Institute for Music Research at The University of Texas–San Antonio: <http://imr.utsa.edu/>
- ◆ State and national band and orchestra association lists
- ◆ Programs from conventions and festivals

Observations

**ANOTHER PREMISE:
Students do respond to quality literature.**

- ◆ Develop a 3- or 4-year rotation schedule of core repertoire.
- ◆ Reducing the technical demands allows time to rehearse and perform more literature.
- ◆ Too many concerts are marred by poor performances of overly difficult music.
- ◆ A much longer list of recommended literature is found in Appendix A of my book, *Teaching Band and Orchestra: Methods and Materials*.

Programming Suggestions

- ◆ “The world got so tired of the ugly, overly dissonant music that I fear the pendulum has swung too far the other way.”

—Francis McBeth

- ◆ “Fortunately, we are trying to return to music that touches the soul instead of perplexing the brain.”

—Francis McBeth

- ◆ “A program should not be a potpourri of compositions the conductor likes, but a dramatic progression to somewhere.”

—Francis McBeth

- ◆ A well-balanced program will have some variety, unity, and contrast.

- ◆ One programming format: opener, major work, soloist, intermission (?), fanfare or march, chamber works (?), lighter works, march.

- ◆ Choosing, rehearsing, and performing a wide variety of quality music will provide a broad educational experience for our students, and a fulfilling and enjoyable performance for our audiences.

- ◆ There is so little time to rehearse and perform music with our students—let’s use our limited time working on music of *lasting value*.

Sample Core Repertories for Band

GRADE ONE

| TITLE | COMPOSER/ARRANGER | PUBLISHER |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Year One | | |
| <i>Sugar Creek Saga</i> | James Curnow | CMP |
| <i>Rondo Royale</i> | Frank Erickson | Summitt |
| Year Two | | |
| <i>English Hunting Song</i> | John Kinyon | Alfred |
| <i>Prelude and March</i> | Bob Margolis | Manhattan Beach |
| Year Three | | |
| <i>A Londonderry Air</i> | John Kinyon | Alfred |
| <i>Minuet and Country Dance</i> | Mozart/Philip Gordon | Presser |

GRADE TWO

| TITLE | COMPOSER/ARRANGER | PUBLISHER |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Year One | | |
| <i>Balladair</i> | Frank Erickson | Bourne |
| <i>Two Moods</i> | Clare Grundman | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>Musette and March</i> | J. S. Bach/John Kinyon | Studio PR/PPP |
| <i>Three Songs of Colonial America</i> | Leroy Jackson | Warner Bros. |
| <i>Jefferson County Overture</i> | John O'Reilly | Alfred |
| Year Two | | |
| <i>Firebrook Prelude</i> | James Curnow | CMP |
| <i>Early English Suite</i> | Duncombe/Finlayson | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>Air for Band</i> | Frank Erickson | Bourne |
| <i>Crusaders Hymn</i> | James Ployhar | Belwin/PPP |
| <i>Bist Du Bei Mir</i> | J. S. Bach/Anne McGinty | Queenwood |
| Year Three | | |
| <i>Dorian Festival</i> | Frank Erickson | Belwin/PPP |
| <i>Ukranian Bell Carol</i> | James Ployhar | Carl Fischer |
| <i>Bristol Bay Legend</i> | Robert Sheldon | Barnhouse |
| <i>Courtly Festival</i> | H. Purcell/Philip Gordon | Belwin/PPP |
| <i>From an 18th Century Album</i> | Theldon Meyers | TRN |

GRADE THREE

| TITLE | COMPOSER/ARRANGER | PUBLISHER |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Year One | | |
| <i>Fanfare, Ode and Festival</i> | Bob Margolis | Manhattan Beach |
| <i>Festivo</i> | Vaclav Nelhybel | Belwin |
| <i>Kentucky 1800</i> | Clare Grundman | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>Variants on an Early American</i> | | |
| <i>Hymn Tune</i> | James Curnow | Jenson |
| <i>Variation Overture</i> | Clifton Williams | Ludwig |
| Year Two | | |
| <i>Chant and Jubilo</i> | W. Francis McBeth | Southern |
| <i>Court Festival</i> | William Latham | Summy-Birchard |
| <i>Polly Oliver</i> | Thomas Root | Kjos |
| <i>Royal Coronation Dances</i> | Bob Margolis | Manhattan Beach |
| <i>Two Gaelic Folk Songs</i> | Thomas Tyra | Barnhouse |
| Year Three | | |
| <i>Overture for Winds</i> | Charles Carter | Bourne |
| <i>Hebrides Suite</i> | Clare Grundman | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>Nathan Hale Trilogy</i> | James Curnow | Hal Leonard |
| <i>Prospect</i> | Pierre LaPlante | Bourne |
| <i>Three Ayres from Gloucester</i> | Hugh Stuart | Shawnee |

GRADE FOUR

| TITLE | COMPOSER/ARRANGER | PUBLISHER |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Year One | | |
| <i>A Festival Prelude</i> | Alfred Reed | Marks/Belwin |
| <i>Blessed Are They</i> | J. Brahms/Barbara Buehlman | Ludwig |
| <i>Emperata Overture</i> | Claude T. Smith | Wingert-Jones |
| <i>First Suite in E-flat</i> | | |
| <i>for Military Band</i> | Gustav Holst | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>Salvation Is Created</i> | P. Tschesnokoff/ Bruce Houseknecht | Kjos |
| Year Two | | |
| <i>Variations on a Korean Folk Song</i> | John Barnes Chance | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>An Original Suite</i> | Gordon Jacob | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>Chorale and Shaker Dance</i> | John Zdechlik | Kjos |
| <i>Irish Tune from County Derry</i> | Percy Aldridge Grainger | Carl Fischer or Southern |
| <i>Masque</i> | W. Francis McBeth | Southern |
| Year Three | | |
| <i>Cajun Folk Songs</i> | Frank Ticheli | Manhattan Beach |
| <i>Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral</i> | R. Wagner/Lucien Cailliet | Warner Bros. |
| <i>English Folk Song Suite</i> | Ralph Vaughan Williams | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>On a Hymnsong of Philip Bliss</i> | David Holsinger | TRN |
| <i>Pageant</i> | Vincent Persichetti | Carl Fischer |

GRADE FIVE

| TITLE | COMPOSER/ARRANGER | PUBLISHER |
|--|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Year One | | |
| <i>Armenian Dances, Part I</i> | Alfred Reed | Sam Fox |
| <i>Candide, Overture to Festive Overture</i> | L. Bernstein/Walter Beeler | Schirmer |
| | D. Shostakovich/ Donald Hunsberger | MCA |
| <i>Overture for Band</i> | Felix Mendelssohn | Schirmer |
| <i>Suite Francaise</i> | Darius Milhaud | MCA |
| Year Two | | |
| <i>After a Gentle Rain</i> | Anthony Iannaccone | Shawnee |
| <i>Chester Overture</i> | William Schuman | Presser |
| <i>Scenes from the Louvre</i> | Norman Dello Joio | Marks |
| <i>Second Suite in F for Military Band</i> | Gustav Holst | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>Where Never Lark or Eagle Flew</i> | James Curnow | Hal Leonard |
| Year Three | | |
| <i>Of Sailors and Whales</i> | W. Francis McBeth | Southern |
| <i>Rejouissance</i> | James Curnow | Jenson |
| <i>Russian Christmas Music</i> | Alfred Reed | Sam Fox |
| <i>Sketches on a Tudor Psalm</i> | Fischer Tull | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>William Byrd Suite</i> | Gordon Jacob | Boosey & Hawkes |

GRADE SIX

| TITLE | COMPOSER/ARRANGER | PUBLISHER |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Year One | | |
| <i>Lincolnshire Posy</i> | Percy Aldridge Grainger | Schott or Ludwig |
| <i>Symphony No. 2</i> | John Barnes Chance | Boosey & Hawkes |
| <i>Symphony in B-flat</i> | Paul Hindemith | Schott |
| <i>Theme and Variations, Op. 43a</i> | Arnold Schoenberg | G. Schirmer |
| Year Two | | |
| <i>Lochinvar</i> | James Curnow | CMP |
| <i>Symphony for Band</i> | Vincent Persichetti | Elkan-Vogel |
| <i>Symphony for Band</i> | Jerry Bilik | RBC Publications |
| <i>Variants on a Medieval Tune</i> | Norman Dello Joio | Marks |
| Year Three | | |
| <i>Colonial Song</i> | Percy Aldridge Grainger | Carl Fischer or Southern |
| <i>Mutanza</i> | James Curnow | Jenson |
| <i>Symphony No. 1</i> ("Lord of the Rings") | Johan de Meij | Amstel |
| <i>Symphony No. 3</i> | Vittorio Giannini | Belwin |

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